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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - SCENESETTER FOR SENATOR FEINGOLD'S DECEMBER 18-20
DJIBOUTI MEETINGS ON SOMALIA

Introduction

1. Your December 18-20 meetings with Somalia and Somaliland politicians, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative as well as NGO and private sector representatives come at a time when some progress in the UN-led Djibouti Peace Process is being undercut by continued feuding among the Transitional Federal Government's (TFG) leadership and threatened by al-Shabaab's steady advances on the ground. The United States is playing a leading role to promote unity and peace. We are working closely with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the International Contact Group (ICG) on Somalia to ensure that the international community's efforts are optimized.

Recent TFG Developments

2. The long-running feud among the TFG's top leadership took a dramatic turn for the worse on December 14, when TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf issued a decree dismissing Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde." The decree cited Hussein's failure to submit a new federal constitution in the year since he has been appointed prime minister, and the Prime Minister's failure to establish a functioning government as the reasons for his dismissal.

3. For his part, Hussein has told us he intends to proceed with plans to have Parliament approve his transitional cabinet, and begin work on the details of a unity government. In the meantime, Parliament on December 15 passed a vote of confidence in Prime Minister Hussein by a reported 143 - 20 margin, effectively rejecting Yusuf's decree.

ARS Moves Forward

4. The Yusuf - Nur Adde feud occurs against the background of measurable progress in the reconciliation process. On October 26, the moderate Islamist Djibouti-based wing of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) and the TFG signed a declaration of their intent to form a unity government. About one month later, the two parties in another declaration outlined what shape that unity government might take.

5. Unlike the TFG, ARS-Djibouti has maintained a united front. Chairman Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, with whom you will meet, followed the October 26 agreement with a well-received trip to south-central Somalia. The Chairman and more than twenty ARS leaders are

currently in Mogadishu, this time they say to stay, in an effort to blunt by their presence some of al-Shabaab's momentum. It was on Prime Minister Hussein's watch that the TFG successfully reached out to the ARS. ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif and Prime Minister Hussein to all appearances have a cordial relationship.

Al-Shabaab Advances

¶6. Moderate Islamist Sheikh Sharif's heroic trip to Mogadishu is a lonely counterpoint to al-Shabaab's recent territorial gains. Since September, the fundamentalist Islamic group has seized control of the key southern ports of Kismayo and Merka, and it reigns supreme in the central Bay, Bakool, Lower Juba, and Lower Shabelle regions, as well as controlling part of Gedo. In the last several days, al-Shabaab has been attempting with some success to extend its reach north through Galgaduud to the Mudug region. Only the key government towns of Baidoa and Mogadishu remain tenuously in TFG hands.

The al-Shabaab Threat

¶7. Although al-Shabaab has been on the march for some time, the combined ineffectiveness of the TFG and its preoccupation with personality conflicts has diminished its ability to counter the threat. The TFG's lack of power on the ground has done little to blunt al-Shabaab's advance. With the creation of a unity government, there is a new understanding of the urgency to provide a TFG-ARS joint military force with an ability to counter al-Shabaab advances. Although al-Shabaab controls much territory, the picture is not as black and white as it seems. In some places al-Shabaab's

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presence is thin and in others it must contest territory with clan-based and other rival organizations.

¶8. Al-Shabaab's successes are occurring in tandem with Ethiopia's plans to withdraw its troops by the end of December. Citing exasperation with the TFG's inability to exert control, the costs of occupation, and the failure of the international community to deploy a muscular peace-keeping mission, the Ethiopian government, after months of threatening, seems more serious about leaving this time. Some Somali and international observers fear that Ethiopia's departure will create a security vacuum which al-Shabaab could easily fill. Others believe that the last several months of the Ethiopian occupation have aided al-Shabaab by providing a cause --the ouster of Somalia's historical enemy-- that all clans could readily rally around. Ethiopia's withdrawal, they believe, would take with it the glue that has held Somalis together to al-Shabaab's benefit, and allow simmering resentments of al-Shabaab's harder-line Islamic rule to bubble to the surface. Rather than bet on the outcome, Secretary Rice and members of her team have been pushing very hard for the authorization of a UN Peace-Keeping Operation that would prevent an al-Shabaab sweep of Somalia.

Somaliland Suffers from Somalia's Chaos

¶9. Somalia's success story, the self-declared autonomous region of Somaliland, had its confidence severely shaken by the three near-simultaneous suicide bombings that rattled its capital Hargeisa on October 29. The bombings, like the piracy plague and recent suspected al-Shabaab cross-border attacks into Kenya, serve as a reminder that sustained instability in south and central Somalia has consequences for areas on its periphery, and has triggered requests by the Somaliland administration to the U.S. and other governments for security assistance, which we are currently examining.

¶10. Even before the bombings, Somaliland had been struggling economically, as increased prices for basic commodities and the international economic downturn began to bite. The independent Somaliland government has appealed for international assistance to support southern Somali "refugees" seeking protection from the conflict in south and central Somalia.

¶11. Efforts to register Somaliland's voters for the March 2009 presidential elections were interrupted only briefly by the bombings. Somaliland President Dahir Riyale Kahin is seeking a second term in office and the two opposition parties have pushed hard for free and transparent elections. All Somaliland's political parties have expressed confidence in and support for Somaliland's constitution and democratic progress.

UN Rep Energetically
Leads Peace Process

¶12. The Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG) Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah has brought experience and energy to the Djibouti Peace Process, bringing former warring parties TFG and ARS to the cusp of a unity government. The SRSG will travel to Djibouti almost immediately after a December 16 ICG meeting in New York that will be attended by Secretary Rice, and that is designed to turn the spotlight on Somalia at a time when the U.S. government is pushing for authorization of a PKO for Somalia.

ICG and IGAD
Focusing International Efforts

¶13. Two international organizations, the ICG and IGAD have helped focus the international community and regional players' attention on Somalia. The ICG has met periodically and has helped to channel international support for ending the crisis. There will be a meeting of the ICG, convened by SRSG Ould-Abdallah, in New York on December 16 at which time the group will chart a collective path forward. With Ethiopia in the lead, IGAD has recently proved itself to be a more aggressive player on the Somalia question.

The Humanitarian Picture

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¶14. Seventeen years of turmoil continue to take their toll on Somalia. An estimated 3.2 million people, representing 43 percent of the population, need humanitarian assistance. This is an increase of 77 percent since January 2008. About six thousand Somalis arrive at Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp each month, and the United States, the largest humanitarian donor, contributed over \$250 million to Somalia in fiscal year 2008. Although the humanitarian crisis is worsening, due to improvements in Somalia's transportation and communication networks, it is not, nor will it likely become, a famine.

¶15. We have scheduled an opportunity for you to meet with humanitarian workers operating in Somalia. They will describe how the deteriorating security situation is challenging humanitarian access. Thirty-four aid workers have been killed in the line of duty this year, and al-Shabaab threats have forced some aid organizations to suspend or close their operations in Somalia.

¶16. A small group of vocal civil society leaders will travel to Djibouti from Nairobi and Hargeisa to meet with you and highlight the challenges they face. In the absence of a legitimate government, the USG has supported civil society's and the private sector's efforts to foster peace, social and economic development, and democratic governance in Somalia. In Somalia, civil society groups provide critical social services, such as education, health, water, and food distribution. However, as with humanitarians, civil society's work in Somalia has been reduced by instability, and many of its representatives now work from Nairobi, or elsewhere.

Business Community:
Seeking Partnerships with U.S.

¶17. We've also scheduled a meeting for you with the Somali business community. The Somalia Business and Investment Council (SBIC) was founded in 2007 by over 100 Somali business leaders in the livestock, shipping, telecommunications, money remittance, and

transport sectors. SBIC is chaired by Ahmed Nur Ali Jumale, the founder of Al-Barakaat investment and money transfer network whose assets (made up of thousands of ordinary Somalis' savings and investments) were frozen in 2001 under Executive Order 13224 to combat terrorist financing. The U.S. Treasury Department recently convened an interagency meeting to discuss the prospect of de-listing. The TFG, the Government of Djibouti, and SRSG Ould-Abdallah also have advocated for the UN Security Council to de-list Jumale and Al-Barakaat.

¶18. The resilient Somali business community, both at home and from regional country offices, provides vital public services, including food and fuel to Somalia. For example, large, diversified Somali companies form the backbone of our in-country USG-funded humanitarian food distribution. Business leaders have offered direct material support to the TFG and would like to see a stable government to enable large-scale reconstruction and development projects. These business leaders work across clan divisions and with the authorities on the ground in all areas. In Mogadishu's teeming Bakara market, businesses jointly fund a private security force considered a model for community-level policing. We engage with SBIC and other key business leaders in Dubai, inside Somalia, and the Somali diaspora, and all are interested in exploring commercial partnerships and opportunities with U.S. businesses.

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